

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Application of David Arthur Kuen et al. Art Unit 3761
Serial No. 10/736,069
Filed December 15, 2003
Confirmation No. 4276
For ABSORBENT GARMENT AND METHOD FOR PLACING AN ABSORBENT
GARMENT ON A WEARER'S WAIST
Examiner Melanie Jo Hand

APPEAL BRIEF

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	REAL PARTY IN INTEREST	1
II.	RELATED APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES	1
III.	STATUS OF CLAIMS	2
IV.	STATUS OF AMENDMENTS	2
V.	SUMMARY OF CLAIMED SUBJECT MATTER	2
VI.	GROUND OF REJECTION TO BE REVIEWED ON APPEAL	4
VII.	ARGUMENT	5
	Claims 1 and 3-35	5
	Claims 36 and 38-41	11
VIII.	CONCLUSION	13
	CLAIMS APPENDIX	14
	EVIDENCE APPENDIX	27
	RELATED PROCEEDINGS APPENDIX	28

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APPEAL BRIEF

This is an appeal from the final rejection of the claims of the above-referenced application made in the final Office action dated July 13, 2007. A Notice of Appeal was filed on October 10, 2007.

I. REAL PARTY IN INTEREST

The real party in interest in connection with the present appeal is Kimberly-Clark Worldwide, Inc. of 401 N. Lake Street, Neenah, Wisconsin 54957-0349, a corporation of the state of Delaware, owner of a 100 percent interest in the pending application.

II. RELATED APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES

Appeals have been filed in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/736,443 entitled ABSORBENT GARMENT and U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/735,978 entitled ABSORBENT GARMENT. The '443 and '978 applications have common subject matter with the case at hand and Kimberly-Clark Worldwide, Inc. is owner of a 100 percent interest in both the '443 and '978 applications. A Notice of Allowance and Fee(s) due has been issued by the Office in the '443 application. The '978 application is still on appeal.

III. STATUS OF CLAIMS

Claims 1, 3-36, and 38-41 are currently pending in the application for consideration. Claims 2 and 37 were cancelled during prosecution of this application. A copy of the claims involved in this appeal appears in the Claims Appendix of this Brief.

Claims 1, 3-36, and 38-41 stand rejected.

The rejections of claims 1, 3-36, and 38-41 are being appealed.

IV. STATUS OF AMENDMENTS

No amendments have been filed after the final rejection.

V. SUMMARY OF CLAIMED SUBJECT MATTER

The following summary correlates claim elements to specific embodiments described in the application specification, but does not in any manner limit claim interpretation. Rather, the following summary is provided only to facilitate the Board's understanding of the subject matter of this appeal.

With reference to the present specification and drawings, claim 1 is directed to an absorbent garment 10 for personal wear about the wearer's waist. See paragraph [0038], page 9, and Figs. 1 and 2. The absorbent garment 10 comprises an absorbent assembly 24 constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer. See paragraph [0039], page 10 and Figs. 1, 3, and 4. The absorbent assembly 24 has an inner surface 128 adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, an outer surface 130, a front waist region 122, a back waist region 124, a crotch region 126 extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist

region, a front waist end 138 and a back waist end 140. See paragraph [0059], page 20 and Figs. 2-6. A garment shell 22 is configured for encircling the wearer's waist. See paragraph [0040], page 10 and Figs. 1 and 2. The garment shell 22 has a front waist region 32, a front waist end 56 at the front waist region, a back waist region 34, and a back waist end 58 at the back waist region. See paragraph [0041], page 11, and Figs. 1 and 2. The absorbent assembly 24 is disposed generally within the garment shell 22. See paragraph [0039], page 10 and Figs. 1 and 2. A waist belt 274 is configured for wear about the wearer's waist. See paragraph [0093], page 37 and Figs. 7 and 8. The absorbent assembly (224 in Figs. 7 and 8) is releasably and refastenably attached generally at the front and back waist regions 122, 124 thereof to the waist belt 274. See paragraph [00101], pages 40 and 41 and Fig. 8. The garment shell (222 in Figs. 7 and 8) is releasably and refastenably attached generally at the front and back waist regions 32, 34 of the garment shell to the waist belt 274 whereby the front waist region of the garment shell is in opposed relationship with the front waist region 122 of the absorbent assembly 224 and the back waist region of the garment shell is in opposed relationship with the back waist region 124 of the absorbent assembly. See paragraph [00103], pages 41 and 42 and Figs. 7 and 8.

Claim 36 is directed to a method for placing an absorbent garment 10 on a wearer's waist. See paragraph [00104], page 42. The method comprises extending a waist belt 274 about the wearer's waist such that an overlapping end portion 276 of the belt overlaps an underlying portion of the belt. See paragraph [00104], page 42. The overlapping end portion 276 of the belt 274 is releasably attached to the underlying portion of the belt to secure the belt on the wearer's waist. See paragraph

[00104], page 42. An absorbent assembly 224 is releasably and refastenably attached to the waist belt. See paragraph [00104], page 42. The absorbent assembly 224 is constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer. See paragraph [0039], page 10 and Figs. 1, 3, and 4. The absorbent assembly 224 has an outer surface 130 and an inner surface 128 adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body. See paragraph [0059], page 20 and Figs. 2-6. The absorbent assembly 224 further has a front waist region 122, a back waist region 124, a crotch region 126 extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist region, a front waist end 138 at said front waist region and a back waist end 140 at said back waist region. See paragraph [0059], page 20 and Figs. 2-6. A garment shell 222 is releasably and refastenably attached to the waist belt 276. See paragraph [00104], page 42. The absorbent assembly 224 is configured for being disposed within the garment shell 222. See paragraph [0039], page 10 and Figs. 1 and 2. The garment shell 222 has a front waist region 32 adapted for generally opposed relationship with the front waist region 122 of the absorbent assembly 224 and a back waist region 34 adapted for generally opposed relationship with the back waist region 124 of the absorbent assembly. See paragraph [00103], pages 41 and 42 and Figs. 7 and 8.

VI. GROUNDS OF REJECTION TO BE REVIEWED ON APPEAL

A. Appellants appeal the rejections of claims 1, 3-36, and 38-41 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over U.S. Patent No. 6,115,847 (Rosch et al.) in view of U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0087137 (Christoffel et al.) and further in

view of U.S. Statutory Invention Registration No. H1440 (New et al.).

VII. ARGUMENT

Claims 1, 3-36, and 38-41 are submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,115,847 (Rosch et al.) in view of U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0087137 (Christoffel et al.) and further in view of U.S. Statutory Invention Registration No. H1440 (New et al.).

Claims 1 and 3-35

Claim 1 is generally directed to an absorbent garment having a garment shell, an absorbent assembly disposed within the garment shell, and a waist belt to which both the garment shell and absorbent assembly are releasably and refastenably attached. Neither Rosch et al., Christoffel et al., nor New et al. teach or suggest such an absorbent garment. As a result, claim 1 and the claims depending therefrom (claims 3-35) are submitted to be non-obvious in view of and patentable over Rosch et al., Christoffel et al., and New et al.

More specifically, claim 1 is directed to an absorbent garment for personal wear about the wearer's waist. The absorbent garment comprises:

an absorbent assembly constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer, the absorbent assembly having an inner surface adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, an outer surface, a front waist region, a back waist region, a crotch region extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist region, a front waist end and a back waist end;

a garment shell configured for encircling the wearer's waist, said garment shell having a front waist region, a front waist end at said front waist region, a back waist region, and a back waist end at said back waist region, the absorbent assembly being disposed generally within the garment shell, and

a waist belt configured for wear about the wearer's waist, the absorbent assembly being releasably and refastenably attached to the waist belt generally at the front and back waist regions of the absorbent assembly, the garment shell being releasably and refastenably attached to the waist belt generally at the front and back waist regions of said garment shell whereby the front waist region of the garment shell is in opposed relationship with the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and the back waist region of the garment shell is in opposed relationship with the back waist region of the absorbent assembly.

As mentioned above, claim 1 is submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,115,847 (Rosch et al.) in view of U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0087137 (Christoffel et al.) and U.S. Statutory Invention Registration No. H1440 (New et al.), in that whether considered alone or in combination the references fail to show or suggest an absorbent garment in which an absorbent assembly and a garment shell are each releasably and refastenably attached to a waist belt.

Rosch et al., with reference to Figs. 1 and 2 thereof, disclose an active wear garment 10 comprised of a pant structure 12 and a skirt cover 14. The skirt cover 14 has a front panel 15 (Fig. 1) secured to a back panel 21 (Fig. 2). The front panel 15 has a waist region 31, and the back panel 21 has a waist region 33. The pant structure 12 includes a front waist

band region 20, and a back waist band region 22 (Fig. 2). The pant structure 12 and the skirt cover 14 are permanently joined at the waist of the garment 10. See column 5, lines 42-45 (wherein the pant structure and skirt cover are described as being bonded together by adhesives or other bonding methods). See also column 1, lines 53-56 in which Rosch et al. teach that the waist band regions 20, 22 of the pant structure 12 are non-refastenably joined to the waist regions 31, 33 of the skirt cover 14. See also column 14, lines 38-43, column 15, lines 2-7, claim 1, claim 6, and the abstract.

In Fig. 4, Rosch et al. disclose a garment 110 of a second embodiment having a trunk (e.g., shorts-type) cover 114 instead of the skirt cover 14 shown in Figs. 1 and 2. The trunk cover 114 can be formed with an integrated pant structure 112 or used by itself (i.e., without a pant structure). When the pant structure 112 is combined with the trunk cover 114, the pant structure and the trunk cover are joined at the waist. See column 12, lines 42-46. More specifically, waist regions 131, 133 of the trunk cover 114 are non-refastenably engaged to front and back waist band regions 120, 122 of the pant structure. See column 16, lines 14-20 and lines 50-57.

Rosch et al. is relied on in the Office action solely for the purpose of teaching a trunk garment worn over an absorbent pant structure. The teachings of Rosch et al. are limited, however, to the trunk garment and pants being permanently secured together or being entirely independent of each other (i.e., having no connection therebetween whatsoever).

Accordingly, as recognized in the final Office action at page 4, first two lines, Rosch et al. fail to disclose or suggest a waist belt having an absorbent assembly releasably and refastenably attached thereto.

Moreover, Rosch et al. do not disclose or suggest a garment shell releasably and refastenably attached to a waist belt as recited in claim 1. In fact, Rosch et al. is devoid of any teaching or suggestion regarding a waist belt.

With respect to the claim 1 recitation of the absorbent assembly being releasably and refastenably attached to the waist belt, the Office relies on New et al. (see page 4, second full paragraph of the final Office action), which discloses a two-piece absorbent garment 10 having a disposable assembly 14 and a belt 12 for supporting the disposable assembly on a wearer. See, for example, Fig. 1 of New et al. The belt 12 is made from receiving material (e.g., loop material) and includes patches 18 of hook material for engaging the receiving material. This allows the belts to be worn by wearers of various sizes and allows the belt to be repeatedly secured about the wearer's waist. The disposable assembly 14 includes a front waist margin 32 and a rear waist margin 34. Patches 18 of hook material (or adhesive) are located in both the front and rear waist margins 32, 34 for allowing the belt 12 to be attached to the absorbent assembly 14. The belt 12 holds the absorbent assembly 14 on the wearer.

Nowhere do New et al. disclose that any other garment can be secured to the belt besides the absorbent assembly. Thus, New et al. fail to teach or suggest releasably and refastenably attaching a garment shell to a waist belt as recited in claim 1. Assuming for the sake of argument that New et al. would motivate one skilled in the art to releasably and refastenably attach the pant structure of Rosch et al. to the waist region of the trunk garment thereof, such a configuration would still fail to teach or suggest releasably and refastenably attaching the trunk

garment (and hence a garment shell as recited in claim 1) to a waist belt.

To this end, the Office relies on Christoffel et al. See page 4, first full paragraph of the final Office action. Christoffel et al. disclose a one-piece, disposable swimsuit for girls. That is, the entire swimsuit is intended to be used once and then discarded. Thus, as in Rosch et al., the various components of the article (in this instance the swimsuit) are not constructed or even intended to be separated from each other. Rather, in each embodiment illustrated and described in Christoffel et al. the swimsuit 20 comprises a chassis 22 that is permanently (i.e., non-refastenably) secured to a bodice 42 to form the one-piece swimsuit. Respectfully, the Office appears to be mixing different embodiments of Christoffel, i.e., the embodiment characterized in the Office action cannot be found in Christoffel et al.

In particular, the Office action relies on paragraphs [0071-0074] of Christoffel et al. See page 4, first full paragraph of the final Office action. Paragraph [0071] discloses the embodiment shown in Figs. 18 and 19 of Christoffel et al. In that embodiment, the bodice 42 and chassis 22 are made from a single piece coverstock with a neck opening and two leg openings. See lines 5-8 of paragraph [0071]. A refastenable fastening system 92 is applied to the front region 28 of the chassis 22 so that the bodice can be releasably engaged to the chassis at the front region.

This teaching is contrary to the Office action's characterization for a couple of reasons. First, the bodice 42 in this embodiment is not absorbent. It is the same single-piece coverstock from which the bodice is constructed. Therefore, in this embodiment the bodice is not releasably

attached to an absorbent pant. Second, the bodice is not releasably attached to the chassis at the front **and rear** waist areas. Rather, Christoffel et al. is pretty clear that the only fastening occurs at the front waist region. This is because Christoffel et al. teaches the bodice being integral with the chassis at the back region, i.e., it is from a single piece coverstock. There is no suggestion for it being a two-piece system. Thus, at best, this embodiment teaches releasably fastening a garment shell to itself and not to a separate waist belt as recited in claim 1. One skilled in the art would not be motivated by this embodiment to separate the elastic elements from the trunk garment of Rosch et al. and then releasably and refastenably attach them together at front and back waist regions of the trunk. Rather, based on Rosch et al. one would be motivated to provide the trunk garment of Rosch et al. with a bodice portion that extends over the wearer's shoulders and attaches to the front of the trunk garment, not to a separate waist belt and not at both the front and back of the garment.

Paragraphs [0072-0074] describe the embodiments of Figs. 20 and 21 in which the chassis 22 is a pant-like absorbent product 98 (relied on in the final Office action) and is attached to the bodice 42. Paragraph [0074] teaches that such an attachment between the absorbent product and the bodice may be by adhesive bonding, thermal bonding or ultrasonic bonding. Clearly none of these bonding techniques yields a releasable and refastenable securement.

In Fig. 20, the bodice covers only the front upper torso and is tied by a suitable string around the wearer's upper torso. In Fig. 21, the bodice covers the front and back upper torso and has a neck opening 48 defined by straps 72. Fasteners 92 secure the straps together at the shoulders of the wearer.

Clearly, these fasteners 92 are not at the front and back waist region of the wearer and are not used to attach the absorbent product 98 to the bodice.

Thus, the embodiments of Figs. 20 and 21 clearly fail to provide any suggestion for releasably and refastenably attaching the bodice to the chassis, let alone to a separate waist belt. Rather, one skilled in the art would be, at best, motivated by Christoffel et al. to provide the trunk garment of Rosch et al. with a bodice that fastens at the shoulders of the wearer, or around the upper torso of the wearer, to hold the trunk garment on the wearer.

Accordingly, Christoffel et al. fail to provide any motivation or suggestion for separating the waist elastic and the trunk garment of Rosch et al. and releasably and refastenably attaching them together at the front and back waist regions of the trunk garment.

Since none of the cited references teach or suggest a waist belt and a garment shell that encircles the wearer's waist and is releasably and refastenably attached to the waist belt at the front and back waist regions of the garment shell, a combination of the references also fails to teach or suggest such a feature.

For these reasons, claim 1 is submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over the references of record. Claims 3-35 depend directly or indirectly from claim 1 and are submitted to be patentable over the references of record for the same reasons as claim 1.

Claims 36 and 38-41

Claim 36 is directed to a method for placing an absorbent garment on a wearer's waist. The method comprises:

extending a waist belt about the wearer's waist such that an overlapping end portion of the belt overlaps an underlying portion of the belt;

releasably attaching the overlapping end portion of the belt to the underlying portion of said belt to secure the belt on the wearer's waist;

releasably and refastenably attaching an absorbent assembly to said waist belt, the absorbent assembly being constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer, the absorbent assembly having an outer surface and an inner surface adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, said absorbent assembly further having a front waist region, a back waist region, a crotch region extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist region, a front waist end at said front waist region and a back waist end at said back waist region; and

releasably and refastenably attaching a garment shell to the waist belt, the absorbent assembly being configured for being disposed within the garment shell, said garment shell having a front waist region adapted for generally opposed relationship with the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and a back waist region adapted for generally opposed relationship with the back waist region of the absorbent assembly.

Claim 36 is submitted to be nonobvious in view of and patentable over the references of record, and in particular Rosch et al. in view of Christoffel et al. and New et al., for substantially the same reasons as set forth above with respect to claim 1. That is, whether considered alone or in combination the references fail to show or suggest a method of placing an absorbent garment on a wearer's waist including releasably and

refastenably attaching an absorbent assembly to the waist belt, and releasably and refastenably attaching a garment shell to the waist belt as recited in claim 36. Claims 38-41 depend from claim 36 and are submitted to be patentable over the references of record for the same reasons as claim 36.

VIII. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, appellants respectfully request that the Office's rejections be reversed and that claims 1, 3-36, and 38-41 be allowed.

Respectfully submitted,

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Via EFS

CLAIMS APPENDIX

1. An absorbent garment for personal wear about the wearer's waist, said absorbent garment comprising:

an absorbent assembly constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer, the absorbent assembly having an inner surface adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, an outer surface, a front waist region, a back waist region, a crotch region extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist region, a front waist end and a back waist end;

a garment shell configured for encircling the wearer's waist, said garment shell having a front waist region, a front waist end at said front waist region, a back waist region, and a back waist end at said back waist region, the absorbent assembly being disposed generally within the garment shell, and

a waist belt configured for wear about the wearer's waist, the absorbent assembly being releasably and refastenably attached generally at the front and back waist regions thereof to the waist belt, the garment shell being releasably and refastenably attached generally at the front and back waist regions of said garment shell to the waist belt whereby the front waist region of the garment shell is in opposed relationship with the front waist region of the absorbent

assembly and the back waist region of the garment shell is in opposed relationship with the back waist region of the absorbent assembly.

3. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly is releasably and refastenably attached generally at the front and back waist ends of said absorbent assembly to the waist belt, the garment shell being attached generally at the front and back waist ends of said garment shell to the waist belt.

4. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly further comprises at least one fastening component disposed at the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and adapted for releasable and refastenable attachment to the waist belt, and at least one other fastening component disposed at the back waist region of the absorbent assembly and adapted for releasable and refastenable attachment to the waist belt.

5. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 4 wherein the at least one fastening component at the front waist region of the absorbent assembly is a hook fastener and the at least one fastening component at the back waist region of the

absorbent assembly is a hook fastener, the waist belt being at least in part constructed of a loop material adapted for releasable and refastenable attachment to said hook fasteners.

6. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the waist belt has an inner surface and an outer surface, the garment shell being attached to the outer surface of the waist belt, the absorbent assembly being attached to the inner surface of the waist belt.

7. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the waist belt has an end portion which overlaps a portion of the waist belt other than said end portion upon extending about the wearer's waist, said end portion being adapted for releasable attachment to said other portion of the waist belt to secure the waist belt on the wearer's waist.

8. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 7 wherein the overlapping end portion of the waist belt has at least one fastening component thereon, said at least one fastening component being adapted for releasable attachment to said other portion of the waist belt.

9. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 8 wherein the at least one fastening component comprises at least one hook fastener, the waist belt being constructed at least in part of a loop material capable of releasable attachment to the at least one hook fastener.

10. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the waist belt has an unstretched length, said waist belt being stretchable along at least a portion of the unstretched length of the belt.

11. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 10 wherein the waist belt is stretchable to a length in the range of about 120 percent to about 200 percent of the unstretched length of said waist belt.

12. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the waist belt has a width in the range of about 6 mm to about 80 mm.

13. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has at least one outer leg opening, the absorbent garment also having a pair of inner leg openings separate from the outer leg opening and disposed within the

garment shell, the absorbent assembly at least in part defining said inner leg openings, said garment shell defining said at least one outer leg opening.

14. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 13 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to provide an elastic fit of the absorbent assembly against the wearer's legs at the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment, the garment shell being configured to generally hang loose about the wearer's legs at the at least one outer leg opening of the absorbent garment.

15. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 13 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to encircle the legs of the wearer and fully defines the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

16. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 13 wherein the garment shell further has a crotch region extending longitudinally between the front and back waist regions of the garment shell, the crotch region of the garment shell at least in part defining a pair of outer leg openings of the absorbent garment which are separate from the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

17. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 16 wherein the crotch region of the absorbent assembly is free from attachment to the crotch region of the garment shell.

18. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has a waist opening, the front and back waist ends of the absorbent assembly at least in part defining the waist opening of the absorbent garment.

19. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 18 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to encircle the waist of the wearer generally at the front and back waist ends of the absorbent assembly to fully define the waist opening of the absorbent garment.

20. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 19 wherein the absorbent assembly is a brief-style absorbent assembly.

21. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the garment shell has a configuration selected from the group comprising shorts, skorts, skirts and swim trunks.

22. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has a waist opening, at least one outer

leg opening, and laterally opposite side seams extending generally from the waist opening to said at least one outer leg opening, the absorbent garment being releasably and refastenably engaged along at least a portion of each of said side seams.

23. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 22 wherein the absorbent garment is permanently closed along another portion of each of said side seams.

24. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 23 wherein the releasable and refastenable portion of each side seam extends generally from the at least one leg opening of the absorbent garment to a terminal point intermediate the at least one leg opening and the waist opening, said permanently closed portion of each side seam extending from said terminal point of the releasable and refastenable portion to the waist opening of the absorbent garment.

25. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 22 wherein the garment shell comprises a front panel assembly having laterally opposite side margins and a back panel assembly having corresponding laterally opposite side margins, the front panel assembly being in generally overlapping relationship with the back panel assembly at the side margins of said front and back

panel assemblies whereby the overlapped side margins generally define the side seams of the absorbent garment, the side margins being releasably and refastenably attached to each other along at least a portion of a length of said side margins to define the releasable and refastenable portion of the side seams of the absorbent garment.

26. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 22 wherein the side seams of the absorbent garment are refastenable along the full length of the side seams from the waist opening of the absorbent garment to the at least one outer leg opening thereof.

27. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 15 wherein the absorbent assembly has laterally opposite outer edges at the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and corresponding laterally opposite outer edges at the back waist region of the absorbent assembly, the front and back waist regions of the absorbent assembly being attached to each other generally at the respective outer edges of the front and back waist regions whereby the front and back waist regions of the absorbent assembly together with the crotch region of the absorbent assembly encircle the wearer's legs and define the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

28. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 27 wherein the front and back waist regions of the absorbent assembly are releasably and refastenably attached at the respective outer edges of said front and back waist regions.

29. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 15 wherein the absorbent assembly further comprises a pair of laterally opposite front side panels extending outward of the absorbent assembly generally at the front waist region on laterally opposite sides thereof, and a pair of laterally opposite back side panels extending outward of the absorbent assembly generally at the back waist region on laterally opposite sides thereof, each of the front side panels being attached to a corresponding one of the back side panels such that the front and back side panels together with the crotch region of the absorbent assembly together fully define the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

30. An absorbent assembly as set forth in claim 29 wherein each of the front side panels of the absorbent assembly is releasably and refastenably attached to a corresponding one of the back side panels of the absorbent assembly.

31. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 30 wherein the garment shell comprises a front panel assembly having laterally opposite side margins and a back panel assembly having corresponding laterally opposite side margins, the front panel assembly being releasably and refastenably attached to the back panel assembly generally at the respective side margins thereof.

32. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has laterally opposite front side margins and corresponding laterally opposite back side margins, the front side margins and the back side margins being in overlapping relationship with each other to define laterally opposite side seams of the absorbent garment, the amount of overlap of the front side margins with the back side margins being in the range of about 0.1 inches (2.5 mm) to about 6 inches (152.4 mm).

33. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 32 wherein the amount of overlap of the front side margins with the back side margins is in the range of about 0.5 inches (12.7 mm) to about 3 inches (76.2 mm).

34. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly comprises a liquid permeable liner

defining the inner surface of the absorbent assembly adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer, an outer cover in generally opposed relationship with the liner and defining the outer surface of the absorbent assembly, and an absorbent body disposed between the liner and the outer cover.

35. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 34 wherein the outer cover of the absorbent assembly is liquid impermeable and the garment shell is liquid permeable.

36. A method for placing an absorbent garment on a wearer's waist, said method comprising:

extending a waist belt about the wearer's waist such that an overlapping end portion of the belt overlaps an underlying portion of the belt;

releasably attaching the overlapping end portion of the belt to the underlying portion of said belt to secure the belt on the wearer's waist;

releasably and refastenably attaching an absorbent assembly to said waist belt, the absorbent assembly being constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer, the absorbent assembly having an outer surface and an inner surface adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, said absorbent assembly further having a front

waist region, a back waist region, a crotch region extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist region, a front waist end at said front waist region and a back waist end at said back waist region; and

releasably and refastenably attaching a garment shell to the waist belt, the absorbent assembly being configured for being disposed within the garment shell, said garment shell having a front waist region adapted for generally opposed relationship with the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and a back waist region adapted for generally opposed relationship with the back waist region of the absorbent assembly.

38. A method as set forth in claim 36 wherein the step of attaching the garment shell to the waist belt is conducted prior to the step of attaching the absorbent assembly to said waist belt.

39. A method as set forth in claim 36 wherein the step of attaching the garment shell to the waist belt is conducted prior to the step of extending the waist belt about the wearer's waist.

40. A method as set forth in claim 36 wherein the garment shell comprises a front panel assembly having laterally opposite side margins and a back panel assembly having corresponding laterally opposite side margins, the method further comprising the step of releasably and refastenably attaching the side margins of the front and back panel assemblies together.

41. A method as set forth in claim 36 wherein the waist belt has an inner surface and an outer surface, the step of attaching the garment shell to the waist belt comprising attaching the garment shell to said outer surface of the waist belt, the step of releasably and refastenably attaching the absorbent assembly to the waist belt comprising releasably and refastenably attaching the absorbent assembly to one of the inner and the outer surface of the waist belt.

EVIDENCE APPENDIX

None.

RELATED PROCEEDINGS APPENDIX

None.